

Strategy Research Project

Full Spectrum Army Officer Management

by

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United States Army War College
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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

FULL SPECTRUM ARMY OFFICER MANAGEMENT

by

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FULL SPECTRUM ARMY OFFICER MANAGEMENT

The soul of our institution rides on what we do in the personnel system.

—General Eric K. Shinseki
Former Chief of Staff / United States Army¹

Army Officer Requirements and Career Management System

Today's Army officers are frequently called upon to engage in sustained combat operations, assist in humanitarian relief activities, and support homeland defense and civil authorities in response to domestic emergencies. Such full spectrum operations and environments are increasingly the norm. New strategic demands necessitate a review and potential modifications to the Army's current human resource management practices in order to accurately provide full-spectrum Army officer management. On January 27, 2012, Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno, briefed reporters at a Pentagon press conference stating "the time is strategically right" to reduce the Army's force structure. "We will reduce our active force end strength from 570,000 to 490,000, which will include a reduction of at least eight brigade combat teams," according to the Army's Chief of Staff.²

A decline in overall Army force structure obviously translates into reduced Army officer requirements. The Army shouldered three significant force structure reductions in contemporary history: the first after Vietnam; the second after Desert Storm; and now a third the result of the 2012 Defense Strategic Review conducted by the President of the United States and Secretary of Defense. Army officer requirements are determined by the national military strategy, doctrine and operational concepts, organizational design and structures, force size and active-reserve component force mix, and technology.³ Announced force structure reductions, while significant, should not shock or imperil the

Army. Force shaping after all is not a new phenomenon, particularly given the conclusion of combat operations in Iraq, as well as troop drawdowns in Afghanistan by 2014. It makes sense to restructure and rebalance Army units and personnel requirements. The important thing moving ahead, however, is making sure Army leaders and human resource professionals spend a significant focus and time on influencing the correct numbers of officers entering, pursuing, and leaving the Army. The Department of Defense policy directs service military manpower requirements meet only the minimum number necessary for vital national defense objectives. Officer manning requirements are therefore programmed to meet only the essential requirements within the strengths established by the Secretary of Defense. These requirements in fact provide for quantitative numbers of civilian, officer, warrant officer, and enlisted positions and are also qualitative in terms of skills and grades. Evolving Army Officer Personnel Management System (OPMS) and human resource functions are fundamental to satisfying new strategic manning requirements, fiscal constraints, and future individual career management and development needs.

Throughout a career of service, Army officers develop talents through unique and rare sets of experiences, education, and formal training. The Army's OPMS is designed to prepare and provide Army officers for current and future mission requirements. The system's objectives are to first meet the Army and nation's requirements for officers; second to have the best officer corps in terms of ability and experience from the perspective of its users; third to provide officers career satisfaction and opportunity in exchange for career commitment; and fourth an ability to adapt to changes in the size and composition of officer requirements.⁴ According to the Department of the Army's

Commissioned and Career Management Officer Professional Development, the purpose of OPMS is to:

- a. Acquire. Identify, recruit, select and prepare individuals for service as officers in our Army.
- b. Develop. Maximize officer performance and potential through training and education in accordance with Army Regulation 350–1, assignment, self-development and certification of officers to build agile and adaptive leaders.
- c. Utilize. Assign officers with the appropriate skills, experience and competencies to meet Army requirements and promote continued professional development.
- d. Sustain. Retaining officers with the appropriate skills, experience, competencies and manner of performance to meet Army requirements and promote continued professional development.
- e. Promote. Identify and advance officers with the appropriate skills, experience, competencies, manner of performance and demonstrated potential to meet Army requirements.
- f. Transition. Separate officers from the Army in a manner that promotes a lifetime of support to the Service.⁵

Today's Army OPMS achieves career management objectives but at increasingly unsustainable costs and often through outdated human resource practices. This paper looks at how the Army manages its active officer personnel (grades O-1 through O-6), and how revised personnel management practices might succeed in improving Army officer career management. Personnel management changes offered in this paper,

while not altogether new concepts individually, take on increased meaning and purpose in the context of an improved OPMS that is more responsive to changing environments, individual needs, and client demands (President, Combatant Commanders, etc). The personnel system, as former Army Chief of Staff General Shinseki noted, is the “soul” of the institution. The “character” then of the Army’s officer corps depends on a personnel management system that acquires quality people, moves them through the institution over time, and, eventually, transitions them out of the organization. It is important to note that personnel functions and systems do not represent a career management system alone, but are dependent upon policy decisions for implementation. Policy decisions are crucial in defining the career management system and determining the shape of the Army’s workforce.

Budget and Force Structure Constraints

The Obama Administration’s January 2012 Defense Strategic Review was the first salvo in deficit-reduction efforts to cut defense spending by \$487 billion over the next decade. The strategic review announced key administration proposals such as: slowly reducing the number of aircraft carriers, trimming excess nuclear weapons, focusing on Asia rather than Europe, and limiting ground troops in favor of technology. The strategic review flatly declared “US forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.”⁶ Essentially, the escalating U.S. budget crisis forced a bold new reexamination of our military’s world-wide commitments and defense strategy. This new strategy was announced amid increasing fiscal constraint and uncertainty, but the message was clear for the U.S. Army and Marine Corps: future force structure and end-strength reductions are on the way.

The Army plans to ramp-down end-strength by 22 thousand soldiers in FY12 and 27 thousand by 2014-2015.⁷ Defense and Army leaders predicted these looming force structure and personnel cuts given recent changes to monetary trends and operating environments. Administration and Pentagon leaders are refocusing the military's strategic emphasis to eminently plausible maritime challenges such as Iran and China.⁸ Reductions in Army force structure and manning saves significant amounts of money for the Administration, and equally allows the Defense Department an opportunity to shift some savings to other services, such as the Navy and Air Force. The key for Army leadership and its personnel community is to execute future officer force initiatives in a responsible and targeted manner. Meeting future officer end strength targets requires a precision mix of accessing new officers, retaining the best officers currently serving, and surgically extending or curtailing officer careers to maintain formidable military readiness.

Officer Career Management Principles and Personnel Functions

Basic personnel management functions, such as accessing, assigning, promoting, and transitioning officers are all part of the Army's OPMS. How the Army executes these personnel functions influences the shape of the officer corps. All personnel management functions are decisive to Army transformation and restructuring efforts.

Department of Defense leaders, outside think-tanks, and various special interests groups advocate dramatic changes to the way the military and Army accesses, assigns, promotes, and transitions officers. The thesis of this research paper is that in order to make changes in these areas, the Army has to reengineer its OPMS to provide full-spectrum officer management. Some changes the Army can and must do on its own;

others will require altering Defense Department policy, and in some areas, even U.S. law. The Army cannot allow uncritical acceptance of its current human resource management bureaucratic norms to continue.

It is imperative the Army move its human capital and personnel management systems into today's new strategic environment. Ignoring the remarkable changes in today's technologies, as well as demands for future Army officer requirements, places colossal risks to national security and to the Army's All-Volunteer Force. Transformation efforts during 10 years of combat in Iraq and Afghanistan found the Army focused on evolving equipment platforms to include Stryker Combat Vehicles, Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) Vehicles, and the advanced ballistic and blast protected Cougar Vehicles. The Army must now focus on the "human side" of transformation. The Army's greatest assets are its young leaders; it is time the Army engages and invests equally on the human side of transition, particularly given the dramatic changes in budget priorities, technologies, and competing environmental demands.

The Army must make significant changes and investments in the management of its Officer Corps. Changes in accessions, assignments, promotions, and transitions and retirements are all past due areas for reengineering and retooling. To be sure, changing the way the Army manages its Officer Corps is not an easy task. No "silver bullet" exists, either in technology or design that makes this task easy. In many cases, change may even require Army cultural and paradigm adjustments. The Army should heed the caution of British historian B.H. Liddell Hart who suggested, "A complacent satisfaction with present knowledge is the chief bar to the pursuit of knowledge."⁹ Status quo within

the Army's OPMS merely moves meaningful change downstream and limits future officer personnel management.

Changing Army Officer Accessions

Accessing and retaining high-quality officers in the current environment of increased deployments and armed conflict may be two of the All-Volunteer Force's greatest challenges.¹⁰ The United States Army has three commissioning sources for officers and future Army leaders. The three primary sources for producing active duty officers include the United States Military Academy (USMA), the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), and Officer Candidate School (OCS). It is important to note, the current framework for Army officer accessions takes place in a "closed" system. Within this system, officers must enter the organization at the bottom before moving up; with "open" systems, such as those used by many corporations and other government agencies, people may enter at any point along a career path. Army leaders are often quick to highlight this "closed" system whenever explaining leader development and officer recruiting issues. Expressions heard include, "the Army has to grow its own future leaders," or "it takes 15 years to grow a Battalion Commander, and over 20 years for Brigade Commanders – we don't just hire them off the street." It is unlikely the Army or other military services will soon go to an open system of accessing military officers along different lateral entry points. Such an in-and-out structure offers tremendous flexibility if the force has to grow quickly, however its drawbacks relate to military experience of the resulting officer corps, to career satisfaction, and to the professional aspects of officership.¹¹

The framework for officer accessions is important because it affects commitment by creating different expectations between the individual and the organization. It also

affects the competence of the work force, the strength of organizational culture, and the network of relationships that can be used to coordinate interdependent parts of the organization.¹² Army officer accession programs have recently and historically produced tremendous leaders, leaders such as General Norman Schwarzkopf, General Eric Shinseki, General David Petraeus, General Raymond Odierno, and General Martin Dempsey. These specific Army leaders in fact, over the past 20 years, have arguably represented the face of America's foreign policy. The Army's officer accessions programs are undeniably producing quality leaders, but it is past time for the Army to adopt a more synchronized officer accession strategy. The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), which is Congress' investigative arm, reported in 2007 that the Army does not have, but needs an accession strategy.¹³ It is important for the Army's leadership to look ahead at future end strength and fiscal requirements in order to make smart adjustments in its officer accessions programs.

According to the condemning 2007 GAO report, the Army's three accession programs are decentralized and do not formally coordinate with one another, making it difficult for the Army, using its traditional approach, to effectively manage risks and allocate resources across programs in an integrated, strategic fashion. Without a strategic, integrated plan for determining overall annual accession goals, managing risks, and allocating resources, the Army's ability to meet future mission requirements and to transform to more deployable, modular units is uncertain.¹⁴ The Army should heed the warnings on officer accessions, and work to consolidate the resources and manpower for all three accession sources. In an age of diminished resources and constraints, does it still make sense to have three different organizations spending

money and resources to recruit future officers? These organizations do not share a unity of effort nor are they strategically focused on shaping the Army officer corps' future. It is time, perhaps, to let Recruiting Command take on full responsibilities of recruiting for all sources of officer accessions. Cadet Command and West Point could then focus on their training and education missions. Having one officer accessions source to work the recruiting end, versus all three, seems to make greater sense given today's mandate to work smarter, cheaper, and leverage existing tools and structures in place.

Accessing and acquiring the highest caliber young leaders are vital to the Army's future officer corps. It is also decisively important to the country's continued National Security. The Army must recognize today's changing and dynamic operating environments in order to adapt officer accessions planning, resource, and development strategies to ensure alignment with future skill requirements. Strategic human resource professionals must reconsider traditional methods for identifying critical skills, as well as recruiting, selecting, and developing talent. Considering the disruptions and hybrid threats likely to reshape our Army's force structures, it is imperative the Army enhance its ability to access and acquire the very top officer talent. An encompassing officer accession strategy should be one of the most critical outcomes for human resource professionals and should involve a new realignment of disparate officer accessions programs, or at a minimum, better collaboration to address Army officer skill requirements.

Changing Army Officer Assignments

Several changes are needed to keep the Army's officer assignment processes viable and consistent for tomorrow's future officer corps. First and foremost, the Army

must update and improve its human resource communication and feedback systems. This is a near-term important need; the requisite technologies and capabilities are available to make desired changes a reality today. The next larger change to officer assignments is the Army must devise a comprehensive approach at capturing and tracking specific assignment requirements, by job or billet, for every single officer billet filled by an Army officer or validated for future Army officer fill. Given current and future competing demands for officers within the Army and among Joint organizations, the Army urgently needs to correctly identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that are conferred and required by each job, school, and training event.¹⁵ With officer numbers declining in the future despite mission demands remaining or increasing, the Army needs a system that reviews the services' needs against available officer inventories and individual officer developmental needs. Developing an improved human resource system that accurately captures officer KSAs and competencies as a result of certain assignments would facilitate a move towards precision officer management as well as formulate a new competency-based officer personnel management system. Such a system then could allow the Army to propose moving away from current Title 10 requirements of time-based promotions, over to a more flexible system that allows for longer careers with wider promotion zones.¹⁶

The Army's assignment policies and practices are governed under the Department of Defense (DOD) Directive 1315.7, Military Personnel Assignments, which establishes uniform policies and procedures that shall maintain an equitable assignment system enhancing career attractiveness, sustaining an assignment base for overseas tours of duty, achieving stability for tour completions, and developing tour lengths

consistent with maintaining a high degree of combat capability and readiness.¹⁷ The Army's regulation on officer assignment policies, details, and transfers goes on to define the officer personnel assignment system as a functional subsystem of OPMS. The goal of this subsystem is to place the right officer in the right job at the right time.¹⁸

The Army's officer assignment process focuses on two areas, "development" and "utilization." For officer development, it is essential the Army proceed now to innovative and implement a new system that assists Army assignment officers and Army officers with the "development" piece of officer assignments. Active component competitive category (ACC) Army officers, grades 01-through-06, have three career management divisions: 1. Maneuver, Fires and Effects; 2. Operations Support; and 3. Force Sustainment. Each division maintains assignment officers who currently act as career advisors and managers for officers within these respective career fields. Assignment officers assist with individual officer development through specific assignments, and advance officers through various assignments based on the individual officer's performance and professional needs. Today the Army's officer career management and development approach is uneven. This is because the Army has left career development advice largely to individual assignment officers or made it a professional obligation for officers to know their own career maps according to DA Pam 600-3. "You are your own best career manager," is a cliché heard often throughout the Army because career advice and officer assignment information are frequently absent unless uncovered by aggressive officers interested in developing their own careers. While some assignment officers spend time discussing development needs with their populations before making assignment decisions, others are known to be more focused

on filling the Army's officer requirements (officer utilization) versus demonstrating sensitivities to an officer's career development needs.

The Army recently announced a new program to correct and standardize the way it trains, develops, and manages careers across the human resource spectrum (enlisted, officers, warrant officers and civilians). This new program is called Army Career Tracker (ACT), and it is the Army's first comprehensive leadership development and career management tool that integrates training, assignment history, and formal and informal education into one personalized, easy-to-use portal. Important too, is the fact that the system is designed for both Active and Reserve Components. Users will be able to monitor their career development and history, search multiple Army education and training resources, enroll in Army courses, and receive personalized advice from their leadership to proactively monitor their career in one place. The Army tested and approved ACT in a Demonstration of Technology (DOT) in November 2009. The program now has Congressional approval, leadership support, and is ready for implementation.¹⁹

Today the Army has a dual approach when it comes to officer assignments and officer development. The Army G1 and Human Resources Command are responsible for officer assignments, while the Army G3 primarily manages officer education and training. The Army's upcoming ACT program should integrate all elements of the Army's human resource management systems (G1) and Army training and education programs (G3). Such a program, available for assignment managers and officers alike, will provide tools to monitor progress toward career requirements and goals. ACT is scheduled for release in 2012, and it offers a promising way forward. If the Army

employs ACT beyond the realm of another Army Knowledge Online (AKO) web site page or stove-pipe tracking tool, it has the potential of becoming an integrated Army approach to building and sustaining multi-skilled, responsive leaders for the 21st Century.

The second assignment component is to “utilize” officers by assigning them with the appropriate skills, experiences and competencies to meet Army requirements. Assignments are typically made for officers with the goal of balancing the best interests of the officers against Army requirements.²⁰ Joint force and Army mission requirements historically outweigh an officer’s personal needs or desires. Since 9/11, the Army has required numerous officers complete repetitive assignments to deployed theaters because of wartime critical requirements. The Army remains influenced by U.S. law, DOD policies, branch proponent requirements, service budgets, and Army leadership guidance when utilizing officers in assignments. Today’s operations are increasingly Joint, and the Army recommends officers focus on developmental positions that both enhance career progression and lead to Joint Qualification status. Operational factors including the constraints of time, Army requirements, positions available, and readiness all influence the amount of time officers spend in each assignment.²¹ Assignment pressures and constraints aside, the Army can and must better utilize the knowledge, skills, and abilities within the officer corps. Utilization within the Army is largely determined by an officer’s rank and specialty branch. Rarely are Army officer assignments contingent upon an officer’s demonstrated knowledge, skills or abilities. The closest thing to a demonstrated competency in today’s assignment process is when a requisition or billet requires an incumbent have a specified past assignment, such as

former company, battalion, or brigade command as the assignment prerequisite. There are assumed competencies built into the current assignment process that inherently values rank over past performance and demonstrated competencies.

A competency-based assignment utilization system can move the Army from grade based assignments towards a system that truly assigns officers to billets based upon their accumulated experience and demonstrated past performances. For some officers, such a system might allow rapid movement between assignments, and others it may result in slower assignment progression. Today we see similar processes in action throughout the Army, when captains for example are pulled to work in major positions, or when majors are assigned to work in lieutenant colonel positions because the officer has demonstrated the necessary KSAs to their chain of command to work at the next higher level. A system that accurately captures an officer's KSAs is a step in the right direction of meeting the Army's true intent of assigning the right officer, in the right job, at the right time. While not grade based, an officer's KSAs are assumed to continue to increase as a result of higher level training, education, and work experience. The Army can identify the most important KSAs required for each Army or Joint officer billet, and then make assignments that best align an officer's competencies to a position, versus assignments by rank alone. Such an overarching billet codification process would likely attract significant push back from bureaucrats and those essential to inputting requisite billet KSAs. It would require significant amounts of work, and the process would be ongoing and dynamic as billets are added, changed, or deleted. Regardless of the work required to implement a competency-based assignment system, the result would equal precision human resource and officer management. Precision not only of the desired

KSAs needed by position, but equally the list of officers that could satisfy position requirements because they meet exact KSA qualifications to get the job based on previous assignments and demonstrated KSAs (not based on rank alone).

The Army's new ACT program may well be the ideal place to build this new approach to managing the Army officer KSAs and competencies. As designed now, ACT provides information to aid officers in the exploration and career development for Operational, Institutional, Self-Development Domains (Structured, Guided, and Personal), and for credentials and certifications. These domains and the KSAs within each are important for officers as they consider key developmental (KD) positions, broadening assignment positions, training, and education. The Army's officer branch communities and proponents, using the Army's current officer professional development guide as a benchmark, could identify those KSAs most appropriate in every career field and level.

Changing Army Officer Promotions

A flexible system of personnel management that rapidly identified proven leaders and placed them in appropriate positions of responsibility helped accelerate the process of change during World War II.²² Today's war in Afghanistan, unlike World War II, does not require a promotion system so flexible that captains with four to five years experience are needed to command battalions. The historical context between World War II and Afghanistan is vivid, but the need for an Army officer promotion system with greater flexibility remains valid to ensure U.S. Armed Forces conduct the wars of the 21st century more effectively.²³ In *Winning the Next War*, Harvard professor Stephen Peter Rosen argues that promotion is a central instrument for instituting change in large

institutions; the more rapidly change is desired, the more directly senior leaders must be able to affect promotion.²⁴

The Army should consider making two important changes to its current officer promotion system. First, as the Army downsizes, recognizing and retaining the very best officers are imperative to preserve the health of the All-Volunteer Force. The Army's promotion system today is geared toward fixed promotion timing, at prescribed flow points. Title 10 law and DOD policies govern when officers are considered for promotion zones (below, in, and above zone). The Army should gradually move away from this current time-based promotion system and phase in a more merit-based and competency-based promotion system. A second change to the Army's promotion system, and by all indications the Army is moving in this direction, is to modernize and update officer promotion assessments. The Army must use multiple sources of input for promotion decisions, unlike today's emphasis primarily on evaluations from an officer's higher chain of command. Objective inputs from peers, subordinates, and other reports can often paint a more comprehensive leader portrait in areas such as morale, mission focus, clarity of priorities, effectiveness of communication, trust in leaders, confidence to perform mission-essential tasks, level of discipline, support for initiative and innovation, and fair treatment of all personnel.

The first promotion system recommendation is the most difficult, because it involves the Army working with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to change federal law and DOD policy for officer promotions. The Army should champion a future officer promotion system that enables promotion opportunities based on a greater emphasis on officer competencies, greater emphasis on experiences, and a greater

emphasis on performance than the current promotion system that relies predominately on time in a grade. Current service guidelines for officer promotion rates, or desired percentage of a particular officer cohort selected for promotion are described in the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1980 (DOPMA) enacted December 12, 1980. DOPMA provides standard officer promotion objectives and timings for all services, which are intended to keep officer authorizations within certain service-specific targets, as a percentage of overall end strength.²⁵ The optimum officer promotion progression by DOPMA is as follows:

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Promotion Timing (years)</u>	<u>Selection Rate</u>
0-2	2	100% (if fully qualified)
0-3	3 ½, 4	95%
0-4	10	80%
0-5	16	70%
0-6	22	50%

Table 1.

By DOPMA progression, an officer entering as a 0-1, or second lieutenant, has an 18 percent chance of being promoted to 0-6 over the course of a 22-year career. Most officers (76 percent) could expect to reach 0-4, and a lucky 38 percent would reach 0-5.²⁶ This time-based promotion system creates uniformity of outcomes across the Services and skills, and has served the Army adequately for 30 years. A more improved and progressive system is needed in order to promote and retain the best officer talent serving in the Army. This new system should be based on promoting officers that demonstrated competencies and KSAs gained from job assignments. As described earlier, integrating an improved Army officer assignment process, one that accurately captures job specific and officer demonstrated KSAs, is important to forward progress toward this proposed new officer promotion system.

In 2006, RAND submitted a report to the Office of the Secretary of Defense that studied competency-based promotions titled, *Challenging Time in DOPMA: Flexible and Contemporary Officer Management*. In this report, RAND offered a model of how a competency-based promotion system might work, using assignment histories from actual 0-4 (major) and 0-5 (lieutenant colonel) populations for all services as a data source. In the competency-based system model, officers were “promoted” according to the following rules: officers became eligible for promotion after completing three assignments in grade; the duration of an assignment had no bearing on eligibility; assignments were mixes of professional military education (PME), “command path” jobs, and non-traditional or “broadening” assignments.²⁷

In analyzing how the competency-based promotion rules affected the career path of the modeled population, RAND found the following:²⁸

The due-course promotion zones for a particular cohort of officers tended to broaden. Some officers tended to progress towards promotion eligibility faster than others, by virtue of taking shorter-duration “command path” jobs. Others taking more assignments in the “broadening” path, progressed more slowly. Overall promotion to a particular rank, for a cohort entering the service at the same time, was spread out over an average of five years, even though all officers were progressing on “due course”.²⁹

RAND found the competency-based system more tolerant of a varied career path. Because the RAND model replaced the time based “gate” for promotion with a gate based on completing three assignments, the officers could pursue broadening assignments, typically longer than command path jobs, without placing subsequent promotions at risk. Again, such changes would require legal, as well as cultural changes within the military, but the incentive for the Army is a higher quality officer promotion pool and gifted officers that might be incentivized to remain in the Army as they would

have more opportunities to pursue broadening assignments such as post graduate education, Joint, Interagency, and non-traditional career field positions.

The second important change for the Army promotion system is the use of multiple sources of input as the basis for promotion decisions. The leading American corporations are ahead of the Army in using "best practice" in making promotion decisions. This does not suggest that the Army should become more like corporate America; it should not, however many companies evolved towards a system of multiple sources of information to support promotion decisions. And while scholarly literature has urged this approach for years, only in the last decade has the practice become routine in any but the most adventuresome work settings.³⁰ The Army recently took steps to adjust the Army Officer Evaluation Report and System to include a more comprehensive 360 degree assessment. This is a positive, but incomplete, step to date by the Army, as it has not yet matured to a system that is either used by promotion boards or takes the evaluated officer completely out of the process of soliciting 360 degree feedback. Naturally, officers will tend to select peers and subordinates to provide evaluation inputs primarily based on a sense that they know or will appreciate the feedback provided. Done correctly, the process of soliciting 360 degree feedback should not undermine the authority of the chain of command, or be susceptible to fostering a "popularity contest." Today's evaluation system is inadequate primarily because it is an exclusively top-down assessment of performance and potential. Devising a comprehensive 360 evaluation system is beyond the scope of this research paper; however it is strongly suggested the Army work on a fair and practical system as it continues to modify its officer personnel

management system and improve the selection accuracy for officer performance and potential on future promotion boards.

Changing Army Officer Transitions and Retirement

The final component of the Army's Officer Personnel Management System is to assist in the transition, or separation of officers from the Army in a manner that promotes a lifetime of support to the Service.³¹ Officer separations are often discussed in relationship to retirements, because under the Army's current system, there is substantial turnover in the junior officer ranks as individuals join the military, fulfill one, two and occasionally three terms of varying lengths, and then move on to ventures outside the military. The Army has a retirement "cliff," with very predictable effects on officer retention curves. Once members cross the 10-year 'halfway' mark, separations tend to drop off substantially. Officer separations and retirements, like officer accessions, impact the overall readiness and health of the Army at large.³² Administering Army officer transitions accurately is critical to force readiness, impacts the quality of the force, and directly impacts the numbers and types of officer accessions required to maintain the quality All-Volunteer Force.

The affordability of an All-Volunteer Force is a hot topic given the pressures to reduce Defense spending and DoD's budget. In May 2010, then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates tasked the Defense Business Board (DBB) to review current Department policies and practices and identify options to materially reduce overhead and increase the efficiency of the Department's business operations. According to the DBB's final October 2011 report titled, "Modernizing the Military Retirement System," the Secretary of Defense is committed to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Defense's (DOD) processes and operations.³³ The DBB recommended

a number of proposed changes to the military retirement system that, while controversial, attracted significant congressional and defense leader attention and momentum.

The DBB's report suggests the current military retirement system has not been meaningfully modified or adjusted to reflect the creation of the All-Volunteer Force. The system was designed in an era when life spans were shorter, draft era pay was substantially less than civilian sector pay, second careers were less common, and skills acquired during military service were not transferrable to the private sector. The DBB compared the current military retirement system to various public, private, and foreign military systems, and found the Army's system unfair, inflexible, and too expensive to remain sustainable.³⁴ The report's recommendation to the Secretary of Defense was a proposal that instead of a retirement being a purely binary system, military members would be vested in a 401K style program very early in their career (3-5 years). This would create an individual retirement savings account for each service member to grow throughout a service member's time in uniform and vest at various transition intervals such as 10, 15 or 25-years, etc. This system would also make contribution adjustments based on a variety of factors such as "combat zones, high risk positions, and hardship tours."³⁵

Adopting some or all of the 2011 Defense Business Board's recommendations for military retirement would dramatically alter the game for Army officer separations and retirements. The Army Chief of Staff indicated changes to areas like Army retirements and benefits were imminent during a January 27, 2012 press conference by stating, "The All-Volunteer Force is the foundation of our military, but the cost of military

personnel has grown at a substantial, unsustainable rate over the last decade. We will not reduce pay, but reductions must occur in the rate of growth in military compensation and other personnel-related costs and benefits.”³⁶ It seems the All-Volunteer Force has become too expensive to afford and maintain, and therefore military retirements are in the budget cuts cross-hairs. Illustrating this, the future military retirement process is noted within the DBB report’s narrative, “the cost of military retirement will seriously undermine future military war-fighting capabilities.” For each dollar of current pay, the retirement plan accrues 33 cents, for a total of \$24B in FY11. Retirement costs for DOD are rising at an alarming rate; future liability will grow from \$1.3 Trillion (of which \$385 Billion is funded) to \$2.7 Trillion by FY34.³⁷

The recommendations by the Defense Business Board, while compelling, are also troubling from the aspect that cost savings are weighted greater than maintaining a high quality future All-Volunteer Force. The report concluded that vesting military personnel along various career points, versus serving 20 years for retirement, makes separation practices fairer and more flexible. The report does not, however, address the impacts that a new vesting system might have on future readiness or on the profession of arms itself. Retired Army officer and scholar, Andrew J. Bacevich, described similar concerns and flaws of the DBB report in a Washington Post article. By focusing on economy and flexibility, the proposed overhaul would commodify military service. The effect would be to transform the profession into a trade, reducing long-serving officers and noncommissioned officers to the status of employees, valued as long as they are needed, expendable when they are not, forgotten the day they leave — just like the workers at any GM plant or your local Safeway.³⁸ Clearly, the military is not a business,

and officers retiring today after 20 years of service have not spent their careers in comparable 40-hour weeks with 401K plans. Comparing Army officer compensation to corporate America's compensation is a slippery slope, and not necessarily one that seems to have been studied appropriately. What do the attrition models look like given 5, 10, and 15-year officer vesting? What level of commitment and professionalism can be expected with officer vesting versus the current proven retirement model?

Recognizing the need to address rising costs and potential for change within the Army's officer separation and retirement venues is important, the Army must nonetheless proceed with due caution.

While giving DBB recommendations a more thorough examination, the Army can and should make changes in one important area of officer separations. That area is involuntary officer separations. If the Army is serious about saving money and retaining the best of the best, it should aim to implement a more aggressive quality review screening process throughout the Army's officer corps. Any human resource assignment officer that has examined an entire officer cohort year group could quickly identify three distinct segments of an officer year group population: hot rocks, solid performers, and bottom feeders. The Army does a solid job screening for the hot rocks and solid performers. This is most often accomplished during Army selection and promotion boards. The Army does not actively, nor routinely, review records for poorer performers. Given budget constraints and interest in retaining only the best officers, the Army should charter promotion boards or a year group review board with the responsibility of screening those officers found in the bottom 5-to-10 percent of any given year group. That 5-to-10 percent would then need to show cause for continued

service, or separate from the Army. The Army's current personnel system retains underperforming officers often years past a career ending evaluation or noted period of professional insufficiency. Not until that officer appears before a promotion board is he or she at risk of elimination or justification to show cause for continued service. The Army can actively manage and transition a healthy amount of officer attrition each year by establishing formalized year group review boards. The board's charter would include reviewing and identifying up to 10 percent of a cohort or year group for separation each year. The Army's officer accessions mission would have to account for such increased officer attrition rates (unless the Army is drawing down). However, this review process seems a fair trade if keeping only the best officers on active duty is a goal in order to remain within stricter officer end-strength requirements.

Conclusion

Current Army officer personnel management practices for the bulk of the Army's officer corps (pay grades 01-through-06), must adapt to a post 9/11 operational environment. The Department of Defense and the Army should review laws, policies, and practices governing officer personnel management in order to institutionalize better human capital management practices required for the 21st century and beyond. The Secretary of the Army should initiate a creative review of the Army's officer personnel management systems to include officer accessions, assignments, promotions, officer transitions and retirements.

Today's Army officer personnel management practices are resource intensive and increasingly impractical. As described in this paper, the Army should look at consolidating the way it accesses new Army officers. Pull together the accession requirements and skill shaping needs for future Army officers by combining disparate

efforts within the Army's Recruiting Command, the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps, and the U.S. Army Military Academy.

Next the Army can improve the way it assigns, develops and utilizes its officers. Officers should be able to leverage today's information age to assist in their developmental needs and career mapping. A new program in FY12 called Army Career Tracker is a step forward in this right direction. The Army must next tie officer assignments to knowledge, skills, and abilities, to ensure officers are indeed assigned to the right jobs and utilized effectively. Billet KSAs should be populated and managed in such a way that officers receive credit for having those KSAs and build upon such KSAs in future assignments.

Future Army promotions must look at officer competencies as opposed to time in grade zones. Army leaders should have the ability to promote officers within a wider band of promotion eligibility, based on achieving requisite competencies in assignments. This change requires congressional and even Army leader support, but would result in officers promoted more on merit and along different time lines than today. This equally ensures the most experienced and capable officers are promoted each board, and not just the best within a given year group or cohort based on time in grade. Promotion selections, based on evaluations other than superior reporting, are also a needed change.

Finally, there are a number of recommendations within DoD to change entitlements on retirements and separations. While savings are important, it is even more vital to our country's security to ensure future changes within the Army's officer personnel management system do not impact the quality or the Army's ability to

maintain an All-Volunteer Force. The Army should conduct serious testing and reviews before eliminating the proven 20-year retirement program. Meanwhile, the Army should look at other officer shaping tools to reduce spending and costs, such as year group review boards. Eliminating underperforming officers that might otherwise remain on DOD's payroll each year seems a better course than reducing military retirement pay for those officers actually completing careers.

Ultimately, the combination of these recommended adjustments will allow the Army to deliver a more flexible officer personnel management system successful in a future of complex operating environments. Making comprehensive Army OPMS changes are hard, but not impossible. The time is now for these changes to begin.

Endnotes

¹ Quote attributed to notes from the author's 2001-2002 assignment as a special assistant to the Army's 34th Chief of Staff, General Eric K. Shinseki.

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³ Roger A. Brown and Harry J. Thie, eds., *Future Career Management Systems for U.S. Military Officers* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1994), 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*, Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 (Washington DC: U.S. Department of the Army, February 1, 2010), 10.

⁶ "Flipping the Coin," January 17, 2012, *The Boston Globe*, linked from the Early Bird, <http://ebird.osd.mil/ebfiles/e20120117863428.html> (accessed January 17, 2012).

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¹³ Robert J. Mcilwaine, *The Army Officer: Recruit, Access, and Retain*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: PA: U.S. Army War College, May 11, 2009), 5.

¹⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Strategic*, 7.

¹⁵ Peter Schirmer et al., *Challenging Time in DOPMA: Flexible and Contemporary Officer Management*, (Washington, DC: RAND 2006), xvii.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, xvi

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Defense Directive 1315.07, "Military Personnel Assignments," January 12, 2005, <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/131507p.pdf> (accessed January 24, 2012).

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²⁰ U.S. Department of the Army, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development*, 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² M. Wade Market, "Winning Our Own Hearts and Minds: Promotions in Wartime," *Military Review*, vol. 84, issue 6 (November/December 2004): 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁴ Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 20-21, quoted in M. Wade Markel, "Winning Hearts and Minds," *Military Review*, vol. 84, issue 6 (November/December 2004): 25.

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²⁶ Sven C. Erichsen, *Protecting Professional Quality: Competency and Certification-Based Officer Promotions*, Strategy Research Project (Carlisle Barracks: PA: U.S. Army War College, August 10, 2011), 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

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